

From the Qur'an to Christianity: ethnolinguistic contact and religious conversion in West Africa

Abstract

The focus of the paper is a study of cultural and linguistic contact in West Africa, especially in the domain of religion. Through an analysis of historical layers of some Arabic borrowings in three languages of the region, Manding, Kpelle and Mano, as well as social contexts in which language contact and vocabulary transmission may have occurred, the paper presents a tentative reconstruction of the way Arabic lexicon came to shape Christian (and especially Catholic) lexicon of Kpelle and Mano. This study argues that the influence of Islam on Christianity should be accounted for not only in terms of synchronic influence, but also in terms of influence on pre-Christian religious practice, some aspects of which have later been incorporated into the Christian practice. The paper provides evidence for the key role of the missionaries' translation techniques in shaping the religious lexicon, and at the same time emphasizes the importance of local interethnic dynamics and language contact.

Keywords: Manding, Mano, Kpelle, Islam, Christianity, religious conversion, language contact

Father Lelong, a Dominican priest and prolific writer, travelling across Africa and Asia to visit his fellow brethren in Christ, left behind an impressive amount of book-length descriptions on missionary activities that are rich in ethnographic observations. One of his favorite places on the Continent was Nzérékoré, the capital of the Guinean province of French West Africa, where the so-called White Fathers preached among the Guerzé (or Kpelle), a Mande ethnolinguistic group¹.

The second part of his book *N'Zérékoré, a Gospel in the Guinean Forest* ("N'zérékoré. Evangile en forêt guinéenne") begins with a discussion of a curious Kpelle word *kalan*² meaning 'Christianity', but also 'secular

¹ Mande is an African language family containing some 60-70 languages. One of its branches is Manding, a dialect cluster which will be one of the main objects of the present paper. The paper discusses two other Mande languages, Kpelle (Guerzé) and Mano, both spoken in South-Western Guinea and in Liberia. Here and in what follows, by Kpelle I mean Guinean Kpelle, since I have not conducted fieldwork among Kpelle in Liberia, but I distinguish between Guinean and Liberian Mano. The Mano and the Kpelle languages belong to two distinct branches of Mande but are spoken by culturally very similar groups whose populations are in contact. Both are genetically distant from Manding. More sociolinguistic information on Manding, Kpelle and Mano will be given below.

² According to the phonological notation, it is written as *kàlàn*, Konoshenko 2018. In what follows, the linguistic examples are given according to the phonological notation, whenever available; for Kpelle, words and phrases that are

and religious education³. The word, according to Father Lelong, could originate from Arabic *qalam*, ‘writing stick’. This hypothesis does not strike far from truth: the word, it would seem, comes from the Arabic: *qara* ‘to read’, rather than *qalam* ‘writing stick’. What Father Lelong clearly overlooks is that the word entered into Kpelle usage via Maninka (which has *kàran* ‘read, teach’), the language of their northern Muslim neighbors, which, in turn, most likely got it from Soninke, a language of another Muslim population further to the North. Kpelle, in turn, passed the word to Mano, another Mande language, where it received a strictly Christian connotation: *kānà* ‘Christianity, catechism, church’.

While borrowings from Arabic into languages whose speakers practice Islam is not surprising in itself, the example shows a less-studied phenomenon – a further spread of Arabic vocabulary to the languages of non-Muslim, including Christian, groups. More importantly still, this example reveals a case of large areal spread, since the word covered an impressive terrain, all the way from Northern Africa across the Sahara and Sahel down to the Guinean forest, as well as a significant historical depth, since this linguistic pilgrimage took about ten centuries to complete.

Taking Lelong’s *kalan* as the most illustrative example, this paper studies the linguistic and cultural contact in West Africa which led to the spread of a religious lexicon, with a special attention to the Forest Guinea (*Guinée Forestière*) region and Mano and Kpelle languages⁴. The paper begins with a presentation of a necessary background and key references on the history of Arabic influence on Manding, a language cluster that includes the aforementioned Maninka (Section 1). In Section 2, I argue that early contacts between Maninka and Kpelle, pre-dating Christian conversion, resulted, in particular, in the adoption of a Maninka-based benediction formula used both in Christian and so-called “traditional” settings (Section 3). In Section 4, I lay the background for the Kpelle conversion to Catholicism and suggest that early missionaries and their translating practices may be responsible for an influx of Maninka (including Arabic-based) borrowings into

taken from the dictionary by Konoshenko (2018) or from her field materials are written with full segmental and tonal notation; words that are taken from the dictionary by Leger (1975) are given as they were found in the dictionary, without tones, however, I adapted the original French-based convention of writing vowels to the IPA. Thus, I wrote é as e, è as ε (Leger 1975: iii). Maninka words are written according to the orthographic convention indicated at the website of the Corpus maninka de référence (Vydrin et al. 2014): <http://cormand.huma-num.fr/cormani/notation.html>. Manding lexical items were consulted in Bailleul et al. (2011) and Vydrin (n.d.). All Mano words and phrases are taken from my own field materials and have full phonological notation, including tones. Acute accent (é) corresponds to high tone, gravis (à) corresponds to low tone, horizontal bar (ā) corresponds to mid tone.

³ « Ce mot de « *kalan* », dont on fait un usage si fréquent dans la mission de Haute-Guinée et qui désigne l’ « Affaire de Dieu » (expression congolaise), n’est pas exclusivement réservé à l’oeuvre religieuse : on l’emploie aussi pour l’école du Gouvernement ou les exercices militaires. Faut-il chercher son origine dans l’arabe *qalam*, roseau à écrire, qui aurait donné le sens dérivé d’enseignement ? En tout cas, sans autre précision, il n’y a pas de Guerzé qui ne songe à la chrétienté lorsque ce terme est prononcé au cours d’une conversation : être du *kalan*, faire du *kalan*, c’est appartenir à l’Église ou participer à son culte. » (Lelong 1949: 77)

⁴ The work is based on 7,5 months of fieldwork among Mano Catholic community between 2014 and 2018 and is supported by data from previous fieldwork among Mano from 2009.

Kpelle. In section 5, I describe the history of Mano conversion to Catholicism and their strong alignment with Kpelle, which resulted in a great number of borrowings and calques from that language, some of which are Maninka and, in turn, Arabic.

1. Arabic influence on Manding

Manding is a language cluster which includes languages such as Bamana (in the French tradition: Bambara), Maninka (in the French tradition: Malinké), Mandinka (Mandingo), Jula, and numerous minor varieties, which are spoken by some 30-40 million people roughly from Kayes in Mali to Abidjan in Côte d'Ivoire and from Dakar in Senegal to Bobo Dioulasso in Burkina Faso. Manding is not in direct contact with Arabic: it is separated from it by other languages, including Soninke, but also a natural barrier, the Sahara Desert. While some influence of Arabic, in particular, through trans-Saharan trade, predated Islamization and was mediated by other populations (Dumestre 1983), historically, direct language contact and bilingualism with Arabic was largely limited to the context of religious practice and education⁵.

While the Islamization of Sub-Saharan Africa started in the late 8th century, it reached the Manding-speaking region in the thirteenth century, at the latest, when the ruling elite of the Mali empire, where Manding was spoken, converted to Islam to a certain degree (Levtzion & Pouwels 2000)⁶. Although through the centuries, Islam in Sub-Saharan Africa has had its ups and downs, today, the majority of the Manding-speaking population is Muslim. A contemporary and historical account of Islamic practice among the Manding is given by Soares (2005). In addition, from the late eighteenth century until the French colonization, several other ethnolinguistic groups in West Africa came to be converted to Islam (Tamari & Bondarev 2013)⁷.

As Zappa argues, the influence of Islam and, concurrently, Arabic⁸ on Manding mainly passed through a “learned orality”, by which he means the “systematic recourse to oral periphrastic translations... of written Arabic texts” (2011: 231; see also Zappa 2009a). The practice of *tafsīr*, oral exegesis of the Qur'an involving different types of oral translations, in Manding-speaking regions can be dated at least to the eighteenth century⁹.

⁵ With some notable exceptions of translations of literary prose (Tamari 2005).

⁶ “Thus, the religious life of the rulers was the product of the adaptation of a unified cosmology and ritual organization, and imams that directed the rituals for the chiefs were part of the court, like the priests of the other cults”. (Levtzion 2000: 75).

⁷ On the Kpelle conversion to Islam, which remains a peripheral phenomenon, see a heated debate online: <http://guineeactu.info/debats-discussions/chroniques/4461-dans-lunivers-des-guerzes-kpelle.html>.

⁸ The patterns of borrowing and calquing from Arabic into Manding are discussed in detail by Zappa (2011) and Tamari (2013).

⁹ A historical overview of the practice on the African continent and an excellent bibliography can be found in (Tamari & Bondarev 2013). A linguistic analysis of some Manding exegetic commentaries was carried out in a series of works by Tamari (1996; 2013).

Interestingly enough, much of the Arabic influence spreads outside the discourse genres associated with religious education and practice to other genres, such as oral epic (Zappa 2009b). A recent quantitative analysis of some Arabic borrowings in a multi-genre corpus of Manding texts¹⁰ (with a special emphasis on Bamana and Maninka) can be found in Vydrin (2018). Some Arabic borrowings into Maninka will be analyzed in the subsequent sections.

2. Maninka and Kpelle contacts and Maninka influence on Kpelle traditional verbal art

The contact between Maninka, the Manding variety spoken in present-day Guinea and Kpelle, is quite ancient and can be dated back to at least the 16th century, the time when the Mali empire was falling apart and the Kpelle, along with other groups, were pushed to the south by the Manding to their current zone of inhabitation, between Guinea and Liberia (Germain 1984). The contemporary linguistic map (Figure 1) indicates a substantial contact zone: the northern border of the Kpelle linguistic area separates it from the Maninka linguistic area. In addition, there is a considerable Maninka diaspora in all major Kpelle towns, and especially in Nzérékoré, the capital of Forest Guinea. As the map illustrates, the entire Kpelle-speaking zone in Guinea is a zone where Maninka is spoken as a *lingua franca*. This should be taken with a grain of salt, since there are definitely different degrees of bilingualism with Maninka.

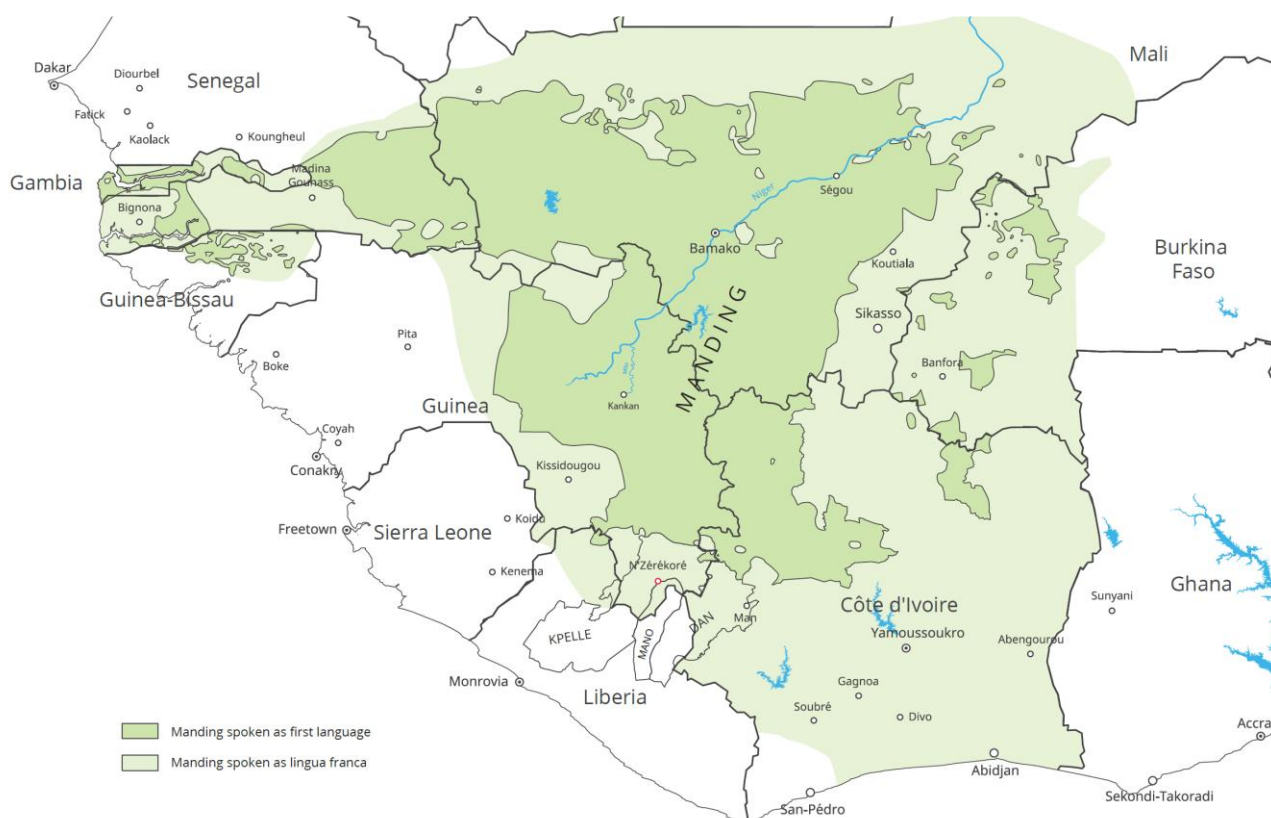


Figure 1. Language map of Manding, Kpelle, Mano and Dan. Adapted from (Vydrine, Bergman & Matthew 2000)

¹⁰ <http://cormand.huma-num.fr/mandeica/>

Today and historically, an important area of contact between Kpelle and Maninka was trade, especially in kola nuts (Lambert 1991). The trade route, connecting Nzérékoré with Beyla, a major trade post, and from there all the way to Kankan and up north, to Niger, must have predated colonial times: as we shall see, the first missionaries among Kpelle, who were contemporaries of the colonization of the Circle of Nzérékoré, came by the very same route.

The contacts between the Maninka and the Kpelle people manifest in a number of trade but also broader cultural lexical items that spread in the entire region with a more or less substantial presence of the Manding people. The most telling example is the Kpelle word *wáá* ‘thousand’, which comes from Maninka *wáa* ‘thousand’, whose original meaning is ‘basket for kola nuts (storing 1000 nuts)’ and which is attested in numerous other languages of the region (Perekhval'skaya & Vydrin n.d.). The words *həŋə* ‘price’ and *wáli* ‘money’ are borrowed from Maninka *səŋkɔ* and *wádi*, respectively. Some words for commercial goods, such as *hahvunɛ* ‘soap’, are also borrowed (Maninka: *səfina*, a word that can be traced back to the Arabic *ṣābūn*). In the religious and broader cultural lexicon, three words stand out: the interjection *báliká* ‘thank you’, a borrowing from Maninka *bárika*, the word *hélláà* ‘sacrifice’, a borrowing from Maninka *sádaka* ~ *sáraka* which ultimately derives from Arabic *sadaqa* ‘(voluntary) offering’, and the word *kalamɔ* ‘teacher’, a borrowing from Maninka *kàranmɔɔ* which is related to the above-mentioned *kàran* ‘to teach’¹¹.

In major towns in Forest Guinea, Maninka and Kpelle interact on the daily basis: in the market, in administration, or in the military, where Maninka clearly dominate. Although Maninka are Muslim, while Kpelle either are Christians or practice their “traditional” religion, occasionally, Maninka and Kpelle may interact in religious circumstances. The following example illustrates one of the occasions when a Kpelle would be introduced to Maninka ritual speech. On November 20, 2015, the Kpelle wife of my primary language consultant, who himself is Mano, invited me to join her at a ceremony of name-giving, which, in Guinean French, is called *baptême* ‘baptism’. The ceremony was organized in honor of the baby whose father was a Maninka truck driver who accompanied the woman, and her comrades, in her travels to her home village on market day. At the market she bought seasonal goods – at the time, it was red palm oil – and then sold them at the main market in Nzérékoré. Needless to say, my consultant’s wife, just like the majority of the urban population in Nzérékoré and especially those involved in trade, speaks Maninka very well.

The blessings of the imam to the child were punctuated by a formula *Ála yé ò ké*, ‘Let God do it’ (literally: God, conjunctive marker, it do) to which everyone present – including the Kpelle guest – responded *àmiina*.

A couple of months later I went to the home village of my consultant’s wife and, as a guest of honor, was offered a chicken. The offering was accompanied by benedictions from Kpelle elders – the woman’s uncle, in particular. The benediction was punctuated by a formula which sounded very similar to the one in

¹¹ The very same borrowings can be attested in Mano, although it is not clear whether they were borrowed from Kpelle or directly from Maninka.

Maninka, *Yálâ ẽ ké*¹², literally, God, conjunctive marker of the 3rd person sg, do. The response to this formula is *mèénà*.

The structure of the benediction and the verbal formula concluding each benediction chunk in Maninka and in Kpelle look suspiciously similar. The interjection *mèénà* is very likely a modified *àmiina*. What is more revealing, however, is that the formula in Kpelle is either grammatically incorrect or has a different meaning than the one in Maninka. The verb *ké* ‘to do’ is used intransitively, without a direct object (‘do’, instead of ‘do it’). The context requires a transitive construction (‘do it’) which would necessitate, according to the Kpelle grammar, a consonant alternation in the verb, *gè* instead of *ké* (as well as a tonal modification): *Yálâ ẽ gè*. If we assume the formula was borrowed from Maninka, it would explain the ungrammaticality¹³: in order for the formula to sound as close to Maninka as possible, it was only minimally adjusted to Kpelle, so the consonant alternation and the tonal change accompanying it were omitted. On a different case of phonetic adjustment in translation and borrowing, see Section 5.

Moreover, it is likely that not only was the formula borrowed but also the entire structure where each chunk of benediction has the same formulaic conclusion. Additional evidence in favor of such interpretation comes from Mano, a Mande language belonging to a distant branch of Mande (in relation to Kpelle and Maninka), but which is spoken by a group that is culturally very close to Kpelle. Since the contact of the Mano with the Maninka is less intense than in the Kpelle – Maninka case (see the language map above), the effects of it are much less noticeable. In particular, the benediction ritual in Mano is much less standardized than the one in Kpelle which, arguably, is due to the fact that Mano was not subject to as much influence from Maninka and preserved more archaic features in its ritual form.

Indeed, a typical sequence for a benediction in Mano is not formulaic: it is a blessing made to the addressee of the benediction, framed in the conjunctive verbal form (‘let him be such’, ‘let such thing happen to him’). The public does not respond by a formula, but rather by repeating the end of each token phrase of the benediction in the habitualis form (‘he is such’, ‘such thing happens to him’). The following excerpt, perfectly illustrating this pattern, was recorded at a “traditional” Mano ceremony of name-giving.

(1) A benediction sequence in Mano (January 14, 2017)

benediction *ī fàṇá wē é tènè*

‘let your force grow!’

Response *lèè tènè*

‘it grows!’

benediction *ī kílí yīè wē é nū*

‘let your good intelligence come!’

Response *lèè nū*

¹² The full formula is *kei e moa tii Yálâ ẽ ké*, I will discuss it in section 5.

¹³ Alternatively, the verb *ké* has another meaning, ‘to be’, so the phrase *Yálâ ẽ ké* could be grammatically correct if it meant not ‘let God do it’, but ‘let God be’.

‘it comes!’

benediction *nàá, mā gèè gǔ lé ī ká, nàá, mā gèè, ī gbǫǫ fḗy wē é bí!*

‘man, I said, you are a boy, man, I said, let this thing in between your thighs shine!’

response *lě̀è bí!*

‘it shines!’

Mano does make use of some formulas, but with a much richer repertoire than in Kpelle. First of all, there is a specific formula framing some chunks of benediction: *zòkpólà àṇènéézè kó b̄y yī* ‘in the peace of heart let us arrive there’ -- *mḗnà* ‘amen’. Here, too, we see the same interjection *mḗnà* which, however, could be borrowed not directly from Maninka *àmiina*, but rather from Kpelle *mḗnà*, a hypothesis that would explain the similarity in the form of the borrowing. Moreover, at the end of the benediction Mano use dedicated formulas, as illustrated in (2).

(2) Concluding benediction formulas in Mano (January 14, 2017)

formula *bà lúò lē yī*

‘It is your benediction’

response *lúò*

‘benediction’

formula *kó sí yì pāà ká*

‘let us take it with full life’

response *màà*

interjection

Only in church do Mano occasionally use the formula *wálà é à kē* ‘let God do it’ -- *mḗnà* ‘amen’ with the same structure as the one in Maninka. Note that the Kpelle formula *Yálá ẽ ké*, too, is incorporated into Catholic Mass or celebration¹⁴. We will see below in Section 5 that the ‘let God do it’ formula is one of many Kpelle-inspired innovations in the religious lexicon¹⁵. However, even in church the traditional Mano benediction ritual occurs, albeit in a slightly simplified form: the most important change is that, unlike the “traditional” sequence illustrated in example 1, there is no repetition of the verb. While the Kpelle use one and the same formula, *Yálá ẽ ké*, the Mano organize the benedictions in chunks and each chunk is concluded by the intermediary formula (*zòkpólà àṇènéézè kó b̄y yī* ‘in peace of heart let us arrive there’ -- *mḗnà*

¹⁴ The formula is typically pronounced prior to Bible readings, after the sermon, and at the end of Mass.

¹⁵ In contrast to Kpelle, the Mano formula is grammatically correct and corresponds to a word-by-word translation of Maninka. It indicates that Mano do not adhere to the Kpelle source as closely as Kpelle adhered to the Maninka source and/or that Maninka acts as a (second) source for the construction.

‘amen’). At the end of the Mass or celebration, Mano use concluding formulas which are also very similar to the “traditional” ones:

(3) Concluding benediction formulas in church Mano (November 22, 2015)

formula	<i>séj tég kò lúò lē yī</i>
	‘each and every one, it is our benediction’
response	<i>mēénà</i>
	‘amen’
formula	<i>kó kú ārzānā dōlā ká</i>
	‘let us take it with a kingdom of heaven’
response	<i>màà</i>
	interjection

While the response to *bà lúò lē yī* ‘It is your benediction’ in the “traditional” setting is *lúò* ‘benediction’, in accordance with the repeating structure illustrated in example 1, in church, the response is *mēénà*. ‘Let us take it with full life’ is replaced by ‘let us take it with a kingdom of heaven’¹⁶. The differences between the “traditional” concluding formulas and those used in church are thus minimal.

In summary, it is very likely that under the influence of Maninka the Kpelle verbal ritual of benediction has undergone simplification. Not only is the Kpelle formula very similar to the one in Maninka ‘let God do it’, followed by an interjection *mēénà*, which is very likely a modification of *amiina* ‘amen’ in Maninka, but also the best explanation of its grammatical incorrectness is the phonetical alignment with the Maninka origin. This formula, and the structure of the verbal ritual, has likely been borrowed from Maninka into Kpelle before the arrival of Christianity and then entered into the Catholic church as it is now used at various points of the Mass and Sunday celebration. Mano, who are in less contact with Maninka, still use their traditional routine which is much less formulaic, but, under the influence of the Kpelle Catholic register, has undergone some innovation and simplification in ecclesiastical language. This is how Mano Catholics, too, have come to make some limited use of their translation of the formula ‘let God do it’. This example suggests that the degree of contact with Maninka, which is much higher in the Kpelle case than in the Mano case, has determined the degree of influence in verbal art – in particular, in the benediction formula. Moreover, this example shows how pre-Christian influence of Maninka on Kpelle verbal rituals has been incorporated into the Kpelle register used in the Catholic church and then spread further to church Mano.

In addition, the case provides an example of the spread of Arabic-based vocabulary: the Maninka interjection *amiina*, deriving from Arabic *‘āmīn*, has been borrowed into the traditional benediction ritual of Kpelle, from there, to the traditional benediction ritual of Mano and, after the arrival of Christianity, into the Christian

¹⁶ Note that *ārzānā* ‘heaven’ is another case of borrowing from Kpelle, borrowed from Maninka and ultimately traceable to Arabic. See Appendix.

benediction. Curiously enough, both Mano and Kpelle have borrowed the interjection for the second time, this time, from French: *amen*. While the earlier borrowing *mɛɛna* is used after traditional benedictions, *amen* is used after typically Christian religious formulas: thus, in Mano, the response to "in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit" will not be *mɛɛnà*, but *amen*.

4. Missionization of Kpelle and the Maninka – Kpelle influence in church

Mano (and Kpelle) in Guinea were evangelized by the missionaries from the Society of the Missionaries of Africa, commonly known as White Fathers (*Pères Blancs* in French). The society was founded in 1868 in Alger, and from then and there on they gradually made their way further south. Another society present in Africa was the society of the Holy Spirit (the Spiritans). It was the Spiritans who, by 1894, established several mission posts in the territories populated by Manding speakers in French Sudan (present-day Mali). Soon after the administrative division of the French colonies, which separated French Sudan from Guinea, the mission posts in French Sudan were transferred from the Spiritans to the White Fathers. From there, the White Fathers moved to the East, to present-day Burkina Faso, and also to the South, to Guinea.

The history of the foundation of the missions in Forest Guinea was related, in many picturesque details, by the abovementioned Father Lelong, a religious writer who published several books on African missionaries and the missionized. The book I am referring to is titled “N’zérékoré. Evangile en forêt guinéenne” (1949).

The trip of the first three White Fathers travelling to evangelize the Kpelle started in Bamako in the end of 1913. From Bamako they traveled by boat, up the Niger river and then the Milo, an offshoot of the Niger, all the way to Kankan and then by land southward, to Nzérékoré.

The mission in the Forest served the obvious goal of proselytism, but also functioned as a “revenue post” (*poste de rapport*) to help support the northern stations in French Sudan. From the start, the missionaries knew that their cash crop would be kola. Their travel diaries tell us how impatient they were, while traveling from the arid north to the wetter south, to encounter the first kola trees. Lelong marks several towns on their way from Kankan to Nzérékoré, which allows us to conclude that the path they took corresponds to the present-day national road linking Nzérékoré and Kankan, former colonial, and now administrative centers of Forest and Northern Guinea, respectively. The first missionary post among the Kpelle ended up being established in Gouécké instead of Nzérékoré, for the missionaries did not want to be too close to the colonial administration, but the little town is just some 40 km up north from Nzérékoré – on the same trade route. The road, now finally paved, is used, and must have been used back in time, to transport numerous goods from Forest to Savannah, including rice, red palm oil, bananas, and slaves, but especially kola nuts.

Kola nuts occupy a very prominent cultural role in West Africa. Not only are they used as a tonic (which explains their place as an original ingredient in Coca-Cola—mind the name), but they also play an indispensable role in divination, sacrificial rituals and other cultural practices (Hauenstein 1974). The plant grows abundantly in the Forest zone, as well as in the Mano and Kpelle habitat.

The missionaries' obsession with kolas did not go unnoticed by the colonial administration. Here is a passage from F. Lelong's testimony: "I would be remiss if I didn't cite here the name of the lieutenant Grolade who commanded the Circle [of Nzérékoré] in 1920. I had the joy to find the following document signed by his hand which the termites of Nzérékoré chose not to devour, certainly out of disgust". And here comes the citation from the document: "A Catholic mission is installed in Gouécké. It is ruled by White Fathers. They do not engage in any proselytism and are solely focused on the stabilization of the kola [crop]. As such, from the point of view of economic development, the mission's role as a competitor is limited, if not null" (Lelong 1949: 62)¹⁷.

By developing kola plantations, the missionaries were aiming to take part in the existing kola trade between Kpelle and Maninka. Indeed, as argued above, there was trade, and borrowing of trade-related lexical items, long before the arrival of the missionaries. In addition to this, the missionaries' background, as well as their methods, may have influenced the way they worked out the religious lexicon for the newly-converted population and facilitated the introduction of Maninka-based terms.

First of all, some of the White Fathers had experience working in Muslim areas – which were, from its foundation, the principal focus of their missionary society. Thus, among the three founders of the missions in Forest Guinea—Father Garlantézec, Father Aloys and Father Bouyssou—the latter two had experience in French Sudan before coming to Guinea; Father Aloys worked in Timbuktu, but more importantly, Father Bouyssou had long worked in Kita and spoke Maninka.

Moreover, while working on the description of Kpelle, including a glossary, which they needed to develop religious translations, the Fathers used Maninka as a *lingua franca* and resorted to the translation services of a language teacher, "named Digiba, of the Mano race, former Djula captive, who had traveled to Sudan with his masters and learned Maninka there. For fifteen years this polyglot, whose knowledge of Kpelle was but purely empirical, was an informant of F. Garlantézec and F. Bouyssou, before dying in Dyogota in 1935" (Lelong 1949: 58)¹⁸. It is quite likely that using Maninka as a contact language could increase the number of direct Maninka borrowings, i.e. the language teachers would suggest Maninka terms and these are what ended up in the White Fathers' Kpelle dictionary. Indeed, let us assume that, due to the contact situation, a Maninka borrowing was already available as one variant in the linguistic repertoire, even if it was not yet the most prevalent. Now, by using Maninka as their metalanguage, missionaries likely increased the chance that the Maninka-based variant be suggested for a translation into Kpelle. Thus, using the example of *kàran* 'study' which was borrowed into Kpelle as *kàlàn*, a missionary may very well have asked, in a perfect

¹⁷ « Une mission catholique est installée à Gouecké. Ce sont des *Pères Blancs*. Ils ne font aucun prosélytisme et ne se livrent qu'à la stabilisation des kolas. De ce fait, le concours de cette mission au point de vue développement économique du Cercle est tout à fait restreint, sinon nul. »

¹⁸ "Les pères poursuivent leur étude de la langue guerzée à l'aide d'un moniteur, nommé Djgiba, de race manon, ancien captif des dyoulas, qui avait voyagé au Soudan avec ses maîtres et avait ainsi appris le malinké. Durant quinze années, ce polyglotte qui, bien entendu, n'avait du guerzé qu'une connaissance purement empirique, sera l'informateur du P. Garlantézec et du P. Bouyssou, avant de mourir à Dyogota en 1935 ».

Maninka: how you say *kàran* in Kpelle? His multilingual informant would likely have been compelled to answer: just like that, *kàlàn̄*. Although an alternative native Kpelle term may have been available, or even more frequent, it seems likely that the most direct equivalent *kàlàn̄* would come to mind first. Given that Kpelle and Maninka are genetically related, the missionaries may not have noticed that the term is a Maninka borrowing, just like native speakers of Kpelle today often do not notice either¹⁹. Once a term enters the missionary usage as a Kpelle equivalent, it gets used over and over again and has a big chance of being stabilized as a term proper in the church register used by native speakers, or even spread outside the church (Hanks 2010).

To sum up, the missionaries came to proselytize among the Kpelle who had historical trading relationships with the Maninka where kola nuts were one of the main trade objects; this long-standing contact between the two populations was likely to have already been responsible for a lot of lexical change. The Kpelle station was supposed to become a revenue post, so the missionaries actively participated in the kola trade by establishing kola plantations. Not accidentally, the very path they took while coming from the north is the much developed kola trade route. Moreover, the contact language between the missionaries and their language consultant was Maninka. If these factors had any repercussion in their translation work, it only intensified the Maninka influence.

Directly or indirectly related to the missionaries' translation practices, but undoubtedly related to the long-term contact between Kpelle and Maninka, the religious lexicon of Kpelle in Guinea contains numerous borrowings from Maninka, many of which can be traced back to Arabic. To name just a few: Kp. *ḡaya* 'insult' < M. *ḡaga*; Kp. *héli* 'prayer' < M. *séli* < Ar. *ṣalāt*; Kp. *hébê* 'book' < M. *sébe* < Ar. *ṣafḡa* 'page'; Kp. *árzáná* 'paradise' < M. *àrijana* < Ar. *al jannah*; Kp. *kíti* 'judgement' < M. *kíti* < Ar. *qaḡiyya*.

5. Kpelle – Mano influence and (oral) translation

Mano and Maninka, too, have long been in contact, but, since their areas of settlement are not adjacent, the contact has arguably been less intense, and less ancient, than in the Kpelle – Maninka case. The influence of Maninka (including original Arabic terms) is substantial in Mano cultural vocabulary and is more present in Guinea rather than Liberia, where Maninka is less spoken (see Appendix), but it is not clear whether the influence comes directly from Maninka or via Kpelle mediation. The fact that there is no Maninka borrowing which is not also simultaneously present in Kpelle speaks in favor of the latter interpretation (see also discussion in Section 3).

¹⁹ Similarly, it can be argued that the Arabic influence on Manding in the domain of Islamic and broader cultural vocabulary crystallized in the Christian translation work for a similar reason: because many White Fathers had knowledge of Arabic. Thus, Father Hacquard, the founder of the Catholic mission in Segou among the speakers of Bambara, an ethnolinguistic group very close to the Maninka, was a fluent speaker of Arabic (Van den Avenne 2015; see also de Benoist 2008).

More importantly, my historic and ethnographic study of the way Mano and Kpelle are used in the Catholic church in Guinea suggests that the Kpelle language is a key intermediary in the transmission of the Maninka religious and broader cultural vocabulary. Two interrelated arguments support this thesis. First, the Kpelle language and people play a central role in the Catholic activities in the Mano-Kpelle speaking zone in Guinea. Because of this Kpelle oftentimes acts as a source of translation of religious texts into Mano. Mano is genetically distant from Kpelle and the two languages are not mutually comprehensible, unless, of course, a speaker is bilingual, which many in the region are. Nevertheless, the Mano texts appear to be almost a word-by-word, morpheme-by-morpheme gloss of Kpelle and, thus, contain many borrowings and calques from Kpelle. Second, a comparison of religious Mano used in Guinea and Liberia shows that the religious register is vitally determined by the areas of activity of different missionary societies with different translation practices and histories of translation experience. These areas of activities, in turn, are shaped by the political borders established in early 20th century. Much of the difference between Guinean and Liberian Mano is explained by a greater influence of Kpelle on Guinean Mano, which brings us back to the role of Kpelle as a mediator of linguistic change in consequence of the history of missionary work.

On the language map (Figure 1 above) we can see that Mano and Kpelle occupy adjacent territories. While in Liberia, Kpelle is the most spoken indigenous language (760 000 speakers, according to Ethnologue), Mano is the fifth most spoken language (305 000 speakers). In Guinea, Kpelle is spoken by 460 000 speakers, being one of the major national languages, while Mano is spoken by only 85 000 speakers. Kpelle speakers outnumber Mano in both countries, but in Guinea, Mano is clearly dominated by Kpelle. In the early years of independence of Guinea, there was an attempt to organize education in national languages before switching back to French. Mano was considered a “dialect” of Kpelle, so the education in Mano-speaking villages was organized in Kpelle (on the Guinean national language program, see Calvet 1987; Sylla 1997). I have personally encountered Mano speakers who first learned to read in Kpelle. The official names of most Mano villages come from Kpelle. Most Guinean Mano speak Kpelle to various extents, especially in the urban areas, like Nzérékoré, where Kpelle outnumber Mano, but few Kpelle speak Mano. Mano – Kpelle intermarriage is also common.

In Liberia the *lingua franca* seems to be English or Liberian English-based creole, and public schooling is in English. Mano villages bear native Mano, and not Kpelle, names. If in Guinea, the Kpelle and Mano (along with some other ethnic groups) are considered and regard themselves as “forestiers”, people of the forest (zone)—that is, indigenous to the Forest Guinea administrative unit—in Liberia, the Mano are clustered together with the Dan, another ethnolinguistic group whose language the Mano often speak.

The influence of Kpelle on Mano in Guinea, in contrast to Liberia, seems quite substantial: various contact phenomena at the level of phonology and morphosyntax are discussed in Khachaturyan (2018).

When it comes to church, in Guinea, the Kpelle influence becomes overwhelming. The first missionary to proselytize among the Mano in Guinea, Father Massol, arrived in 1941, or 27 years after the arrival of the missionaries among the Kpelle. A year later, the first Kpelle priest was already ordained. When the first Mano mission post, in Yalenzou (a Kpelle term, Yèi in Mano) opened and became a center attracting Mano

Christians from the rest of the Mano zone, Kpelle already had three missionary posts, and the number was growing fast. Moreover, the missionary presence among Mano did not last for long. At some point Father Massol must have been transferred to Yomou, to the West of Yalenzou²⁰, and replaced by Father Voisard. The latter left an indelible trace in the village memory: up until now, a local Catholic school bears the name of “Jardin d’enfants Saint Paul Voisard “. By 1962, however, Father Voisard was in Lola, to the East of Yalenzou (Vieira 2005: 221). As I was told by a priest in Nzérékoré, the reason why he moved away from Yalenzou was likely disputes he had with the inhabitants of Yalenzou. Thus, as early as 1962, some twenty years after the White Fathers started their mission among Mano, there was no missionary left in the Mano zone.

From the start then the missionary presence among Kpelle was more substantial and more successful, than among the Mano. It seems likely therefore that both White Fathers working among the Mano in Guinea were consulting their colleagues working among the Kpelle. An illustrative example comes from Lelong who, describing his encounter with Father Massol, cites the following dialogue:

“[Father Massol:] The missionaries of Liberian Mano [...] had translated “Holy Spirit” with a word which means ‘a spirit of the forest’. One should say *kili mésie*.”

[Father Lelong:] I will say *kili mésie*, my Father” (Lelong 1949: 188).

And indeed, up until now the commonly used term in the language of Mano Catholics in Guinea is *kili mésie*, ‘spirit – pure’. In Liberia, just like Father Massol observed, *gèè púlú* ‘spirit (of a dead person) white’ is used²¹. Note that in Kpelle, the expression is *kili màǎhèyěe*, where *kili* is largely synonymous with Mano, meaning ‘spirit’ (a source of borrowing?) and *màǎhèyěe* means ‘pure’. The similarity between Guinean Mano and Kpelle terms suggests that, given that there was another term available, the term that Guinean Mano ended up adopting was a calque from Kpelle.

In 1967, all the Guinean missionaries were expelled, as the government of independent Guinea insisted on the Africanization of the clergy. Mano and Kpelle Christians were left to their own devices. Luckily for Kpelle, they had a very dedicated priest, Raphaël Téa, who, among other texts, translated the Sunday Missal, the primary reference in the Catholic church which often substitutes the Bible, as it contains the religious texts used for holiday and Sunday celebrations. This and other texts in Kpelle are in active circulation in the Kpelle Catholic community. The Kpelle community is flourishing, and new priests continue to be ordained almost every year. In Nzérékoré, a multiethnic town, Mass is often held in Kpelle.

²⁰ In the history of the Catholic church in Guinea written by Vieira not much is said about the Forest Guinea region, but there is a note that in 1962 Father Massol was in Yomou (Vieira 2005: 221).

²¹ Note also that Guinean Protestants use the Liberian term *gèè púlú* which also was used in the Liberian translation of the New Testament, which is a highly authoritative text among Protestants. A comparison between the language of Guinean Mano Catholics and Protestants provides additional evidence supporting the view that, due to the church history, the language of the Mano Catholics was largely shaped under the influence of Kpelle.

Guinean Mano Catholics remain a small and peripheral community in the region where the Kpelle clearly dominate. All the priests who serve among the Mano in Guinea are Kpelle-speaking and, whenever they come on a visit to a Mano village, celebrate Mass in Kpelle. The only exception is a bilingual Kpelle - Mano priest. Although the first two ethnically Mano priests, in a long time, were ordained in 2017, they serve outside their home country. All the catechists and prayer leaders are trained in Kpelle. These facts suggest that Mano religious specialists and ordinary members of the congregation have a background knowledge of the religious Kpelle register. In addition, some catechists perform spontaneous oral translations of the readings from the aforementioned Kpelle Missal²², which results in lots of borrowings and calques. All prayers, many hymns and some other texts are translated from Kpelle and, as we will see below, bear a strong mark of Kpelle.

In Liberia, by contrast, Kpelle does not play such an important role in church. Although much field- and archival work about missionization in the north of Liberia is still to be done, it seems that the missionaries from the Society of African Missions (*Société des Missions Africaines*) who were responsible for the evangelization of the region did not use so much Kpelle as a reference—on any account, they did not use Guinean Kpelle. The only Catholic Mass that I attended in Liberia—in Ganta, a city in the North of Liberia at the border with Guinea with a substantial presence of Mano—was held in English. In the Liberian Mano villages that I visited Kpelle church documents are not in use, and the service is conducted in a mix of Mano and English. Thus, English seems to be the most important source of influence in church in Liberia.

As the first example illustrating the Kpelle – Mano influence in Guinea, I suggest returning to the ‘let God do (it)’ formula which, as I mentioned and as I now argue, was borrowed into Mano from Kpelle. Indeed, the Mano formula ‘let God do it’ is used only when the catechists read from the *Sunday celebration without priest* (Célébration dominicale sans prêtre), a document containing main prayers and ritual formulas used by the catechists and prayer leaders in church. The document is a close translation from Kpelle, so the Mano formula ‘let God do it’ occurs whenever there is a corresponding Kpelle formula in the source text. However, the Mano formula could not be considered an equivalent to Kpelle preexisting the process of translation, since it is not used outside the church. Rather, the formula emerged in the process of translation. Moreover,

²² In general, Mano priests and catechists prefer to orally translate the Bible: while the Old Testament remains untranslated, so there is no option, the translation of the New Testament into Mano published in Liberia (UBS 1978) is very often avoided. Not only the reading of special characters, including tonal notation, requires a special skill, but also, according to the speakers, the fact that the translation was made into a different dialect adds another complexity. The translation is made from Kpelle (one catechist consulted) or, much more frequently, from French. Although such practice is reminiscent of the practice of “translational reading” in the Islamic context mentioned above (see also Eguchi 1975), and could, given the broader argument presented in this paper, be another result of Maninka influence, a safer position to adopt would be to simply say that oral translation is for a number of reasons simpler than reading of the existing translation. Note also that the Evangelical Christians present in the region never recur to oral translation; the difference could be explained by different language ideologies and relationships to the authoritative texts.

the full Kpelle formula is *kei e moa tii*²³ *Yálâ ě ké*, where the *kei e moa tii* part is visibly formulaic and could not be glossed by my colleague, a specialist of Kpelle (this is why it is left without tones). The Mano formula in full is *ké à bō kiliā Wálà é à kē*. Below I suggest an analysis of the Kpelle formula and argue that *ké à bō kiliā* in Mano is a very close gloss of *kei e moa tii* in Kpelle:

(4) Calquing from Kpelle into Mano in the ‘let God do (it)’

Kpelle	<i>ke-i</i>	<i>e</i>	<i>mo-a</i>	<i>tii</i>	<i>Yálâ</i>	<i>ě</i>	<i>ké</i>
	do.that	he	it.do-HABITUAL	like.that	God	let.him	do
Mano	<i>ké</i>	<i>à</i>	<i>bō</i>	<i>kiliā</i>	<i>Wálà</i>	<i>é à</i>	<i>kē</i>
	do.that	he.it	do.HABITUAL	like.that	God	let.him it	do

‘Doing as he does like that, let God do (it).’²⁴

Putting aside technical linguistic details, as well as the literal meaning, the Mano formula appears to be a word-by-word, morpheme-by-morpheme translation of Kpelle. In ‘doing as he does like that’, ‘he does’ is put in the habitual form. This habitual form is reminiscent of the traditional response to the benediction, where the verb of the token phrase in the conjunctive form of the blessing is repeated in the response in the habitual form (see example 1). A Mano sequence could look like: ‘let God do it’ – ‘he does it’. Thus, the overall formula in both languages meaning ‘doing as he does like that, let God do it’ incorporates both a blessing (‘let God do it’) and what could be a response to it (‘he does it’), in a slightly modified form. Crucially, the Kpelle formula is the source of the Mano formula and is used in the traditional setting, as well. Three conclusions can be made from this example. First, the benediction model in Mano which includes as a response a repetition of the verb (see example 1) is more archaic and was, in a modified way, preserved in the Kpelle formula *kei e moa tii Yálâ ě ké*. Second, more related to the argument presented in Section 3, the presence of the aforementioned archaism in the Kpelle formula provides another piece of evidence that Kpelle used to have a benediction schema similar to the one in Mano but switched to a more formulaic one under Maninka influence. And third, innovations in Mano Christian lexicon may appear through close calquing of Kpelle in translation. In what follows, I am giving more examples of that latter phenomenon.

The second example comes from the Apostles’ Creed prayer, which is one of the central Catholic prayers and a great illustration of the volume of calquing from Guinean Kpelle to Guinean Mano: the extent is such that in Guinea, the Mano Creed is almost entirely a calque from Kpelle. In Liberia, the Mano Creed is completely different, which emphasizes the importance of regional differences. I will illustrate this by comparing some excerpts.

²³ The original notation in the *Célébration dominicale* is *key moa ti*. The Kpelle writing in indigenous documents does not always fully correspond to the transcription of the speech, so it would not be too much of a stretch to argue that the formula sounds like *kei e moa tii*.

²⁴ Another meaning available is ‘being as he is like that’, depending on the interpretation of the verb *ke* both in Mano and in Kpelle. The problem of transitivity of ‘do’ and the choice between ‘be’ and ‘do’ is discussed in section 3.

(5) Excerpts from the Apostles' Creed in Liberian and Guinean Mano

I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth

Liberian Mano

māà wálà lé ē ηwó séj kē mī ká ā
I.have God that he.is problem all do person:CS with TOP

ηwó gē ηwánà ká,
problem see truth with,

lèí Wà tǎǎ ō kē mī
sky and earth they do person

‘Lit.: I have seen in truth the affair of God who is the person who did everything, the person who did the sky and the earth’

Guinean Mano

māà wálà ηwó yí dō ηwánà ká
I.have God problem interior know truth with

‘Lit.: I have known in truth the problem of God,

dāā wálà, ηwó séj là sí mī
father God problem all surface take person

‘father God, person who dominates everything,

lèí wélé wà tǎǎ ō bēī mī
sky bone and earth they create person

‘creator of the sky and the earth’

Liberian and Guinean Mano prayers have important differences in structure. While in Liberian Mano, ‘Almighty’ is embedded in the structure of the phrase (‘I have seen in truth the issue of God who is the person who did everything’), in Guinean Mano it is extraposed (‘father God, person who dominates everything’). There are differences in lexical choices, as well: “the Almighty” in Liberia vs “the Father Almighty” in Guinea; “Almighty” is translated by “the person who did everything” in Liberia, while in Guinea it means “the person who dominates everything”; ‘see’ as a translation of *believe* in Liberia vs ‘know’ in Guinea; ‘do (the sky and earth)’ in Liberia vs ‘create’ in Guinea, simple *lèí* ‘sky’ in Liberia vs *lèí wélé* sky + bone, meaning the same thing as ‘sky’, in Guinea.

These differences between Liberian and Guinean Mano become especially apparent when the Guinean Mano version is compared to the Guinean Kpelle version which looks strikingly similar.

(6) Excerpts from the Apostles' Creed in Guinean Kpelle and Guinean Mano

Kpelle	<i>ηᾱᾱ</i>	<i>Yálâ</i>	<i>mèni</i>	<i>kílí</i>	<i>kólóḡ</i>	<i>à</i>	<i>têḡ</i>
	I.have	God	problem	spirit	know	with	truth
Mano	<i>māà</i>	<i>wálà</i>	<i>ηwò</i>	<i>yí</i>	<i>dō</i>	<i>ηwánà</i>	<i>ká</i>
	I.have	God	problem	interior	know	truth	with

‘Lit.: I have known in truth the problem of God,

Kpelle	<i>ḡᾱḡ</i>	<i>Yálâ,</i>	<i>mèni</i>	<i>kéléé</i>	<i>ηᾱ</i>	<i>hééḡó</i>	<i>múḡ</i>
	his.father	God	problem	all	his	mighty	person
Mano	<i>dāā</i>	<i>wálà</i>	<i>ηwó</i>	<i>séḡ</i>	<i>là</i>	<i>sí</i>	<i>mì</i>
	father	God	problem	all	surface=his	Take	person:CS

‘father God (Kpelle: **his** father God), person who dominates everything,

Kpelle	<i>yèlē</i>	<i>kólòḡ</i>	<i>dà</i>	<i>lòṛ</i>	<i>dĩ</i>	<i>pèlĩ</i>	<i>múḡ</i>
	sky	envelope	and	earth	they	create	person
Mano	<i>lèí</i>	<i>wélé</i>	<i>wà</i>	<i>táḡ</i>	<i>ō</i>	<i>bèĩ</i>	<i>mì</i>
	sky	bone	and	earth	they	create	person

‘creator of the sky and the earth’

Guinean Mano structure is the same as in Guinean Kpelle. While Kpelle has a complex expression for ‘knowing’, *kílí kólóḡ* spirit know, Mano also has *yí dō* interior know for ‘know’. In both languages a simple verb, *kólóḡ* in Kpelle and *dō* in Mano, can be used to express the idea of ‘knowing’. Kpelle, just like Mano, has a complex expression for ‘sky’, although a simple one *yèlē* means the same thing. In Mano, as mentioned above, simple *lèí*, as opposed to *lèí wélé*, is also available and used in the Liberian version of the prayer. Kpelle, just like Guinean Mano, uses ‘create (the sky and earth)’ (and not ‘do’, like Liberian Mano). Both add ‘the Father’ to ‘the Almighty’. The most curious part, however, seems to be the ‘the Almighty’. In Kpelle, that part literally means ‘all things’ mighty person’, or, closer to the gloss, ‘things-all-its-mighty-person’. In Mano, that part literally means ‘things-all-dominating-person’. Mano has several words meaning ‘to dominate’, the one chosen can be glossed as ‘surface – take’. The reason it was chosen is probably because ‘surface’, *là*, is homophonous with the third person sg. possessive pronoun *là* ‘his, hers, its’ and is found in exactly the same structural position as the third person sg. possessive pronoun in the Kpelle version: *ḡᾱḡ Yálâ mèni kéléé ηᾱ hééḡó múḡ* ‘things-all-its-mighty-person’ (Kpelle) vs *dāā wálà ηwó séḡ là sí mì* ‘things-all-surface=its-take-person’ (Mano). The choice of the Mano form could be made in order to bring the Mano translation as close as possible to a literal translation of Kpelle.

The similarity between the Guinean Mano text and the Guinean Kpelle text cannot be accidental, taking into account that the Guinean Mano translation is strikingly different from the Liberian Mano one. Given the sociolinguistic context of production and circulation of religious texts and the dominating position of Kpelle in the Catholic church in the Forest Guinea region, that similarity between Guinean Mano and Kpelle could be best explained if we assume that the Guinean Mano text was modeled with direct reference to the Guinean Kpelle text.

The final example concerns a case of Kpelle-to-Mano calquing where, among several possible variants one was chosen for phonetic rather than semantic reasons, such as in the choice of the word ‘(I believe in the) holy Catholic church’. In Liberian Mano, a borrowing from English is used, *shózi* ‘church’. Guinean Kpelle uses the word *kpòŋ* ‘group, gathering’. Note that in Kpelle, the word may mean groups of temporary character, without any social cohesion, such as a crowd at the market, or some social groups which have sustained interaction, such as a work group that regularly unites for agricultural labor. In Mano, in contrast, at least two words are available: *gbū*, a temporary gathering, and *gžà*, a group that has a sustained interaction, like a work group. A church community is often conceptualized in terms of *gžà*. For example, when at a reunion of a work group a person wants to attract everybody’s attention and establish silence, he or she will say out loud the name of the group and then the interjection *wāyē*. Similarly, the president of the Yalenzou church community says *Krístà wāyē*!, where *Krístà* functions like the name of their “work group”. Even if the church is conceptualized in Guinean Mano in terms of *gžà*, work group, the word chosen for the translation of the word “church” was *gbū*. The reason seems to be that it is phonetically closer to the Kpelle term *kpòŋ* which was used as a source.

Thus, it seems quite clear that religious Kpelle strongly influences religious Mano in Guinea and that Mano translations are directly modeled after Kpelle. Crucially, in exactly the same way as native Kpelle terms and constructions get borrowed and calqued, those terms that are originally from Maninka are also transmitted. Thus, in the same Creed prayer, ‘he will come again to judge the living and the dead’ ‘to judge’ in Liberian Mano is translated by *mèŋsà dō* ‘judgement establish’, but in Guinean Mano, by *kítí ká* ‘judgement cut’ and in Guinean Kpelle, by *kítí téyé*, also meaning ‘judgement cut’. Not only was the overall construction, ‘judgement cut’, likely calqued, but also the word *kítí* was borrowed from Kpelle into Mano. *Kítí*, as mentioned above, is a borrowing from Maninka and, ultimately, from Arabic. In Kpelle, the expression *kítí téyé* is used outside the church, such as for court cases or palavers. Outside the church, however, Guinean Mano uses the same expression as Liberian Mano, *mèŋsà dō*. Thus, a secondary effect of the vast and systematic process of modelling of (religious) Mano after Kpelle is that Kpelle becomes a transmitter of Maninka vocabulary, some of which is originally Arabic. Due to the intensity of calquing in church, much of that vocabulary is limited to the church register (such as *kítí* ‘judgement’), but some, such as *mēénà* ‘amen’ occurs in other, “traditional” genres.

Conclusion

Studying the spread of religious and broader cultural lexicon in West Africa, the paper stresses the importance of ethno-linguistic contacts and orality. It provides specific contexts in which linguistic

transmission could occur: 1) the practice of oral exegesis and translation of the *Qur'an* in the Manding case, which becomes a point of contact with Arabic, 2) trade and public religious ceremonies, which have become points of contact between Maninka and Kpelle, most likely, way before the arrival of the missionaries, 3) specific translation practices of the missionaries, which facilitated the introduction of Maninka borrowings into (religious) Kpelle, and 4) the practice of Kpelle – Mano translations in church, including spontaneous oral translations, which become points of intensive contact and interference between Kpelle and Mano. Thus, step by step, a tentative reconstruction is made of the way Arabic borrowings have made their way across the Sahara, Sahel and Savannah all the way to the Guinean forest.

This study hopes to add new evidence on the history, social dynamics, and modalities of linguistic and religious contact in West Africa. It argues that the influence of Islam on Christianity should, to a considerable extent, be accounted for not only in terms of synchronic influence (Soares 2006), but also in terms of influence on pre-Christian religious practice, some aspects of which have later been incorporated into the Christian practice (on a similar point, see Peel 2003). Furthermore, because of their specific background and translation techniques, the White Fathers who evangelized Mano and Kpelle quite likely accentuated the influence of the Islamic vocabulary. Thus, the study shows once again that translation, especially translation in religious context, is not a neutral activity, but can become a source of cultural, as well as linguistic change (Hanks 2010). Finally, after the missionaries left, interethnic contacts within the church have continued and strengthened, which has led to a further spread of religious lexicon. It reflects the central role that local populations play in evangelization and emphasises the importance of local ethnic dynamics, relativizing and contextualizing the role of colonial dominance in language and culture, including religious conversion (Hefner 1993).

Appendix

Manding - Mano – Kpelle correspondences

	Liberian Mano (deZeeuw & Kruah 1981; UBS 1978)	Guinean Mano	Guinean Kpelle (Konoshenko 2018; Leger 1975)	Manding (Vydrin n.d.)
thousand	?	<i>wáá</i>	<i>wáá</i>	<i>wáa</i>
price	<i>sɔ́ɔ́</i>	<i>sɔ́ŋ</i>	<i>hɔ́ŋɔ́</i>	<i>sònkɔ</i>
money	<i>pɛ̀lèè</i>	<i>wé̀lì</i>	<i>wá̀lì</i>	<i>wádi</i>
soap	<i>wḗŋ</i>	<i>sàfna</i>	<i>hahvunɛ</i>	<i>sàfina</i> (Ar. <i>ṣābūn</i>)

sacrifice	<i>sàlà</i>	<i>sàlà</i>	<i>hélàà</i>	<i>sàraka</i> (Ar. <i>sadaqa</i> , (voluntary) offering)
teacher	<i>kīzǝ̀mì</i> book show person	<i>kàlàmbò</i>	<i>kalamɔ</i>	<i>kàranmɔɔ</i>
pray, prayer	<i>sènē bō</i>	<i>sènē bō</i>	<i>hélì</i>	<i>séli</i> (Ar. <i>ṣalāt</i>)
book	<i>kī</i> (= 'skin')	<i>sébè</i>	<i>hébê</i>	<i>sébe</i> (Ar. <i>ṣafha</i> 'page')
to thank, thank you,	<i>zúò</i>	<i>báliká</i>	<i>báliká</i>	<i>bárika</i>
church, Christianity	<i>sóó̄l</i> < Eng. church	<i>kānà</i>	<i>kàláj</i>	<i>kàran</i> 'read, teach' (Ar. <i>qara</i> 'to read', cf. Qur'an)
heaven	<i>lèi, wàlà pà</i> God at	<i>ārzānā,</i> <i>wàlà pà</i> God at	<i>ārzáná</i>	<i>àrijana</i> (Ar. <i>al jannah</i>)
save	<i>lā</i>	<i>kísì bō, lā</i>	<i>kihibo</i>	<i>kísi</i>
judgement	<i>mèḡsà</i>	<i>kítí</i>	<i>kítí</i>	<i>kíti</i> (Ar. <i>qaḍiyya</i> 'judgement')
insult, offense	<i>ḡwó yōō kē</i> do bad thing	<i>bàkà bō</i>	<i>baɣa bo</i>	<i>bàga</i>

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